coalition for the homeless

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Myths and Facts

MYTH

Homelessness is a permanent problem. We will never solve it.

FACT:

The **Fact** is there are proven solutions to the problem of homelessness — and many of them were pioneered in New York City. They are just not being implemented at a scale large enough to solve the crisis.

Permanent supportive housing — a model of housing developed in New York City that combines affordable housing with support services for individuals and families living with mental illness or other disabilities — has been proven to reduce homelessness AND save taxpayer dollars otherwise spent on costly shelters and hospitalizations. Also, targeted affordable housing assistance for homeless people, like Federal housing vouchers, is proven to reduce homelessness and help keep formerly homeless people stably housed for the long term. And living-wage jobs and other support services, like childcare and access to health care, can help low-income families and

MYTH

Homelessness is not a housing problem, it's only a jobs problem – and homeless people simply don't want to work.

FACT:

The **Fact** is the major cause of homelessness is the severe lack of affordable housing, both in New York City and across the United States. By every measure, the housing affordability gap — that is, the gap between incomes and housing costs — has grown dramatically over the past four decades.

From 1991 to 2017, NYC lost 1.1 million apartments that rent for $800/month or less. Between 2017 and 2021 alone, the city lost 96,000 units with rents under $1,500. You would need to earn $45/hour – three times the minimum wage – at a full-time job to afford a two-bedroom apartment at the Fair Market Rent in NYC.

Around 30 percent of homeless families in NYC are employed but still can't afford an apartment. In addition, a significant portion of homeless adults have barriers to employment such as a physical or mental disability. Unfortunately, disability benefits, currently around $840/month maximum for a single person, don't come close to covering the cost of rent in NYC.

FACT:

The **Fact** is that people become homeless for many reasons, from loss of a job or lowered wages, to a health care crisis, increased rent, a family emergency, or even landlord bullying. Homelessness is driven by systemic factors like the lack of affordable housing and institutional racism, not personal failings. Surveys at the central intake center for homeless families in New York City show that many families seek shelter directly after an eviction or after fleeing domestic violence, and many others seek shelter after residing in doubled-up, overcrowded, or substandard housing. Many families seeking shelter recently suffered job losses or a loss of public benefits.

MYTH

All homeless people have mental illness or substance use disorder.

FACT:

The **Fact** is the majority of homeless New Yorkers are homeless because they cannot afford housing. In New York City, more than 60 percent of all shelter residents are in families and around 30 percent are children. Only a small percentage of adults in

instability and trauma of homelessness can exacerbate these challenges and make it even harder for people to manage their health. Permanent supportive housing is a vital resource for helping homeless people with physical or mental disabilities to achieve stability.

MYTH

All homeless people are dangerous.

FACT:

The **Fact** is people experiencing homelessness are far more likely to be the victims of crimes than the perpetrators. The vulnerability of homelessness increases the risk of being victimized.
One study found that half of the homeless people surveyed reported experiencing violence, and the risks were higher for people who were older, women, or those who were homeless for more than two years. Stable housing is key to safety.

MYTH

Housing assistance causes more families to enter homeless shelters.

wide range of academic experts have found, in numerous research studies, that permanent housing assistance like public housing or Section 8 vouchers helps homeless families escape homelessness and remain stably housed. In addition, the myth that providing housing assistance to homeless families causes a surge in families seeking shelter has been disproven by academic research studies and years of experience. Indeed, after the Bloomberg administration eliminated Federal housing assistance for homeless families in 2005, the number of families seeking shelter increased.

MYTH

The people who live in rent-regulated housing don't need it and are making market-rate rents increase.

FACT:

The **Fact** is that most rent-regulated tenants have low and moderate incomes, and rent-regulated apartments remain much more affordable than non-regulated housing.

Nearly one-third of rent-stabilized tenants and more than half of tenants in rent-controlled or other regulated housing have an income below $25,000. In fact, more poor New Yorkers live in rent-stabilized apartments than in public housing. In 2021,

Rent regulation remains one of the strongest tools for keeping rental housing in New York City affordable for poor, working-class, and middle-class New Yorkers. Indeed, the weakening of rent regulation in recent decades, such as the implementation of the since-repealed vacancy deregulation policy, led to the loss of tens of thousands of rent-regulated apartments and is a major cause of worsening affordability in New York.

MYTH

If people can afford a television or smartphone, then they really aren't poor.

FACT:

The **Fact** is right-wing pundits and ideologues have long tried to deny the existence of poverty by claiming that poor people are not poor simply because they have access to typical consumer goods like cell phones, refrigerators, and TVs. As the cost of consumer goods and even some traditionally luxury goods like televisions and smartphones have gone down in price, the cost of essentials like food and housing have steadily gone up. People own these devices now not simply because it is the next big thing, but because it is often the only way to stay connected to the world. Phones and the internet are critical to securing and maintaining employment or housing. With ever-advancing technology, it is

MYTH

It is wrong to give money to people on the street because it is always a scam or they will use the money for drugs.

FACT:

The **Fact** is not all panhandlers are homeless, but almost all are poor and in need. Whether or not to give money to people panhandling on the streets or in the subway system is a personal decision. But there is certainly nothing wrong with giving money to people in need, and one can also make donations to the many reputable not-for-profit organizations that help our homeless neighbors.

MYTH

There is a city of “mole people” who live under the subways.

FACT:

The **Fact** is that only a very small number of homeless people sleep in the train and subway tunnels, largely because they are dangerous and inaccessible. Many homeless people in New York City sleep in shelters,

MYTH

People living on the streets should just go to a shelter.

FACT:

The **Fact** is the right to shelter was a very important step toward ensuring the safety of homeless people, but municipal shelters can be very difficult places to live for those people who have languished on the streets for years. Shelters are tight quarters with many rules and regulations, which can be confusing. Nearly all municipal shelters for homeless single adults have barracks-style dormitories with as many as 100 beds in a single room, and these arrangements often do not suit the needs of homeless people living with serious mental illnesses like PTSD or mood disorders.

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RESOURCE GUIDE

CHEAT SHEET

coalition for the homeless

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